

Holy Bible

ESCHATON

The Final Testament

John T. O'Connor

Eschaton

The Final Testament

Return to Eden

(or How Faith Prevailed over Knowledge)

John T. O'Connor

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Foreword

The events described in this book, although they have not yet occurred, are true. Only the identities and behavior of the principal characters have been truly imagined.

The writing, grammar, and punctuation of this book are convoluted, making it difficult to understand. Many of the nouns and adjectives gratuitously injected into the narrative are arcane or, worse, biblical.

The following are your top ten best reasons for not reading this post-historical documentary:

- *It is not fiction.*
- *It is too long.*
- *Some critics might consider it irreligious or, even, blasphemous. (They'd be right.)*
- *It contains a hint of sexual allusion, but not enough to make it either stimulating or art.*
- *It is unsuitable reading for undergraduate college students and senior faculty.*
- *It is uninteresting, disorienting, and the writing stinks.*
- *If you read the whole thing, you will conclude you have wasted your time.*
- *Many readers will ultimately notice that they cannot read Aramaic.*
- *You can't say you weren't Foreword warned.*

Return to Eden

(or How Faith Prevailed over Knowledge)

Book I: Journey to Paradise

Zacharias Adam Goldman and Sarah Evelyn Samuel had just embarked on that idyllic stage of life commonly referred to as engagement (Hebrew: *vort*).

Following their solemn commitment to each other, they felt that their lives had begun to take on exciting new meanings as they dreamed of the unimaginable joys their future life together would bring. The glow of self-awareness plus their progressive discovery of each other's intrinsic virtues grew with each passing day as they journeyed toward the ultimate blending of their souls in holy matrimony.

Then, they decided to travel to Cincinnati.

The primary excuse for the excursion was to attend the Bar Mitzvah of Sarah's cousin, Tobiah. Although a Jewish boy automatically becomes a Bar Mitzvah at 13-years-old, his was both a solemn and lavish celebratory event. Normally a placid group, the entire group of kinsfolk celebrated to the point of giddiness. However, after the Torah -- and some cash -- was passed, our vacationing couple began to feel a gnawing

sense of deflation and, to a degree, even boredom. Returning to their room at the Country Inn, the betrothed sorted through that series of brochures designed to offer visitors guidance to local attractions.

The Inn, along with its *‘home style decor, family friendly staff, complimentary breakfast, and free wireless’*, offered a *‘packaged’* experience at a discount rate that seemed like an offer almost impossible to refuse.

Moreover, their corporate host would even donate part of their room reservation back to the attraction.

Welcome and Prepare to Believe

“The state-of-the-art 70,000 square foot museum brings the pages of the Bible to life, casting its characters and animals in dynamic form and placing them in familiar settings. Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden. Children play and dinosaurs roam near Eden’s Rivers. The serpent coils cunningly in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Majestic murals, great masterpieces brimming with pulsating colors and details, provide a backdrop for many of the settings.”

It was a little late in the day and the Museum was 12 kilometres away, but if they caught a nearby Uber ...

Our betrothed couple arrived at the Creation Museum a few minutes after the 5 p.m. last admission. However, the kindly cashier, while collecting the \$60 entry fee, permitted them to enter with the caution that the doors would close at 6 p.m. Even then, the janitors were starting to sweep the corridors.

Virtually alone in the Museum, our hero and heroine walked briskly through the maze of meandering walkways, *‘entering the era of the Bible and witnessing the true time line of the universe unfolding through its seven C’s of History.’* As they paused, *‘after delving into the belly of Noah’s Ark where they listened to the sounds of thunderous, driving rains and the pounding of water against the sides of the great Ark,’*

Adam checked his iPhone. 6:17 p.m.?

Alerted, our intrepid couple checked the hallways, then the windows, only to view a parking lot empty except for a brightly colored service truck. The animals in the petting zoo, including the dromedary camel, Gomer, had been returned to their stalls.

Still, no reason to panic. They were together and they could take their time viewing one of the more compelling exhibits until they came across a custodian who would facilitate their exit.

Our lovers stopped to rest at a divergent point in the Garden diorama where exotic animals co-mingled and children played near Eden's rivers.

It was a romantic spot, dark and faintly luminous. They sat momentarily on the Styrofoam rocks, closed their eyes and embraced.

Suddenly, there was strong light and the lovers' reverie was broken. Adam started with a slight discomfort in his chest. Even so, he noted how radiant Eve looked in the ethereal glow.

He also noted that she was naked, but he wasn't certain what to make of that.

There was motion and sound around them. The water flowed. The children made playful noises. Animals scratched, purred and snorted.

There were also human figures, partially shrouded by foliage, but seemingly unadorned by civilized raiment.

Everything and everyone was vibrant and alive.

2. Lilith, the Garden Snake with a Brogue

Adrenalized, but unabashed, Adam and his companion, Eve, walked through the fantastic Garden, occasionally stopping to pet the browsing dinosaurs and other terrestrial vertebrates.

Delicious fruits and berries seemed plentiful. The waters were pure and cool. It was summertime, and the living was easy.

Days, weeks, perhaps months or years, passed. Who could tell? It was a timeless world. There were no timepieces, monthly credit card invoices or annual tax forms. No searching or shopping for essentials, such as toilet paper, was required. There were no shopping carts; no malls; no discount stores; no parking lots; no bicycle lanes.

The Garden was a blissfully unchanging world free from breaking news, intercollegiate sports, preemptive war, ethnic conflict, internecine strife, corrupt politics, computers, spam e-mail, social networking, Oscar-winning movies, television sitcoms, or, for that matter, buildings, houses, toilets, highways, billboards, ...

It was also largely a world without words. There was really nothing much to say. All one needed to do was exist - under the beneficent, watchful protection of a loving God.

Within this paradise, occasionally, Adam thought about Eve. Why did God think he needed a companion? Was it worth a rib? He vaguely recalled that there might be another way to produce another human.

No matter. In Eden, Eve was not an economic burden and she could ride smaller dinosaurs quite well.

One celestial day, while gathering figs for lunch, Adam and the ever-attendant Eve came upon a fruit-laden, but oddly isolated, tree. At its base was a chiseled stone tablet revealing that it was the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*.

The Tree was surrounded by a ribbon of plastic yellow tape repeatedly warning '*Caution - Do Not Cross*'. Apparently, this either did not apply to or did not deter the comely green serpent who appeared to be comfortably ensconced in a crotch of the tree.

Surprisingly, the serpent, a female named Lilith, was a very talkative creature. She seemed to speak with a hint of an Irish brogue which, as you know, can be both disarming and charming.

The serpent was also an entertaining storyteller. She spun fables of how those who ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge went on to win Nobel Prizes and have incredibly satisfying sex lives, whatever that was.

Adam, for one, was not convinced by these fantasies, but he had some doubts about Eve's reactions.

He couldn't be certain, but he thought that her nipples stiffened as the serpent waxed poetic over the sex lives of the apple-eaters.

Clearly, Eve was not ashamed.

Later, alone and intrigued by her provocative stories, Eve visited the serpent again, ostensibly to chat about female figure problems, including her inexplicable belly button.

However, becoming ever more voluble and confidential, Lilith began telling stories of an Early Eve whom she had urged to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge so that she might be more like God.

Early Eve not only ate, but exuberant with her new knowledge, rushed off to offer the fruit to her man.

'And the eyes of the two of them were opened.'

And they really liked what they saw.'

3. The Danger-and Desirability-of Knowledge

After adding substantive detail to what they saw, Lilith continued her story of the Early Eve and Adam:

“Aware now of their nakedness, and not having access to rayon - or even cotton, Early Eve made coverings of fig leaves for them both. When He happened by, not being up on the news, God asked them what they were doing. Early Adam pointed to Early Eve, and Early Eve pointed to me even though I don’t even eat apples.

“God was surprisingly upset. It appears that Knowledge was His special domain. Once it became a commodity, a host of undeserving people would have access to Knowledge -- all due to this one unauthorized transgression. He never should have created the Apple.

“Blaming Early Eve above all, He then cursed all women with pain in childbirth. In addition, He then banished both of His sinful, fruit-loving farmhands from His garden. To add to their penalty -- as well as to avoid future rib resections, God promised that, in the future, ‘the seed’ would be passed through women or ‘woman’ as He put it.”

For several reasons, this decree came as very welcome news to Early Adam.

“God then posted a chubby cherub at the entrance to the Garden of Eden in order to block the transgressors way to the Tree of Life, - ‘lest he put out his hand ... and eat, and live forever.’

It turns out that posting the cherubim (with a fiery revolving sword) as tree guard was a far more effective strategy than the yellow ribbon and the warning tablet.

Nevertheless, it was too late.

As God foretold, Early Adam did not live forever.
He expired after only 930 years.

However, in his brief lifespan, Adam and his Early Eve independently and vigorously began creating new life to populate a whole new world.

Therein, Lilith explained, the escape of Knowledge had literally created a ever-growing problem for God who, for some reason, felt obligated to monitor every thought and action of this burgeoning brood of Eden’s escapees.

Rapt with excitement, our new Eve is persuaded.

The green serpent with the Irish brogue seemed to be on to something.

To create such a strong backlash from God,
Knowledge must not only be very useful, but it must
truly impart Godlike powers.

However, *'Is the acquisition of Knowledge worth sacrificing the carefree life in the Garden?'* or, alternately, would it be possible to obtain this fructose-induced Knowledge without being banished from Eden, suffering birth pains, losing immortality, and falling from Grace?

Eve is no dummy. Hadn't she earned a Master's Degree in Business Law from NYU? So, she set about devising a plan.

In her conception, Adam, although complacent, self-satisfied, and overly cautious as most men, must play a part in her innocent deception.

Eve believes she and Adam must, first, attain their immortality by eating from the *Tree of Life*, which is a heavenly sanctioned move for Eden's residents.

Beyond that, Eve must persuade God that it is in His best interest to allow them or, at least, her, to obtain Knowledge.

4. Eve Propositions God

It wasn't easy getting God's attention - what with His need to look after, and record, every action of every creature in the world - in real time.

Moreover, with the viral spread of the carnal, if not the intellectual, component of Knowledge, matters were getting out of hand exponentially.

Just two millennia after Christ arrived to redirect its spread, Humans with Knowledge (on earth alone) were doubling in numbers every half century.

Assuming the Rapture was not called into play before then, Early Eve's global spawn was expected to exceed 9,000,000,000 (9×10^9) by as early as A.D. 2050

In light of the ever-intensifying burden thus placed upon Him, it wasn't hard to appreciate God's righteous anger towards the two miscreants whose egregious fructal sin created this burden for Him.

Therein lay the foundation for Eve's stratagem. Amidst all the confusion and conflict in the universe, it was obvious to her that God, like Early Adam, needed a helpmate.

Eve knew just the woman for the job.

Eve began by preparing a job description.

On a secretarial level, His new helpmate would assist God in keeping track of all the burgeoning human activities.

Strategically, His assistant would design and direct a series of measures by which the Knowledge humans had illicitly acquired could ultimately be dissipated so that all God's children could be returned to Paradise to enjoy a state of perpetual blissful ignorance.

How? Eve didn't know. She hadn't yet tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. But, when she was authorized to, she was confident that she could concoct a scheme to ensure that everything would be heading back to '*original pre-sin*' in Eden.

Selling her proposal to a besieged and beleaguered God was far easier than she anticipated. By the time she finally encountered God at His workstation, Eve learned that all His hard-drive storage capacities were nearly exhausted.

He hadn't rested in ... well, a long time.

Along with being in danger of falling behind in cataloguing the moment-by-moment activities of all living creatures, the gossamer souls of the innocent casualties of Earth's wars, drug overdoses, suicides and scourges were piling up in Purgatory.

Worse, since Limbo, that way-station to Hades, had been preemptively shut down by an overzealous Pope, everyone else was going straight to Hell.

Eve did not consider it blasphemy to profess that God was at His wit's end.

Just as He sought Early Adam's help in tending His Garden, He now needed enlightened, capable help in managing His external affairs.

Moreover, if an effective strategy could be devised to induce the Knowledge genie back into the apple, Eve would be worthy of His redemption on behalf of all women.

Well, except for Early Eve.

5. God Takes the Bait; Adam (& Eve) Bite

Being pleased with Eve's proposal, God summoned, not Eve, but Adam to His side. Destroying Knowledge, or anything for that matter, was a man's job.

Accordingly, God would enfranchise Adam to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as a precursor to His ordained campaign to corral human Knowledge and return the faithful to His fold.

Frantically, the eavesdropping Eve tried to interject that God might conduct a broader personnel search, perhaps using a human resources director, only to learn that God despised those employed in personnel management above all other human miscreants.

Adam was His man.

That very evening, Adam returned to his bower carrying one of His magic apples. Adam was exulted at the honor God had bestowed upon him even though he had not yet given any thought to what extinguishing Knowledge among humanity might entail.

One bite was all it took. Adam Knew, and looked at Eve in a strangely unsettling way.

For her part, Eve was sorely discomfited. She had been discriminated against owing to her sex. Worse, she felt her ideas had been expropriated, even plagiarized.

Here she was in Paradise, no less - and she was unhappy.

If the respondent weren't God, she would have sued.

The moment Adam retreated behind a bush to relieve himself, Eve seized the remains of the magic apple and gnawed at it until nothing but its seeds remained.

These, she secreted in a fig leaf for possible future use.

Upon swallowing, Knowledge came to Eve rapidly. On his return, she checked to find that Adam was circumcised and well hung, a good augur.

Unexpectedly, Eve began to notice that Eden itself could be rather uncomfortable. She felt chilled. Her surroundings smelled rank. Several insects were trying to draw blood from her. The dinosaurs suddenly looked terribly menacing. Her hair was a disheveled mess.

And Adam was smiling.

6. Escape from Eden

With every passing day, God's 'people problems' were literally multiplying. Incessant births plus longer lives continued to steadily outpace deaths due to war, famine, suicide, traffic fatalities, and murder, thus leading to ever greater hordes of humans - particularly, cranky, old gasbags who kept praying (and paying) for still longer life and a cure for the disease of aging.

Whereas, at one time, these old farts were viewed as venerable sages, now in excessive numbers, they were increasingly regarded as shrunken, wrinkled, and comically unhinged - plus they smelled bad.

Most of this aged and unproductive surplus of humanity could be found spending their ever-expanding lives in retirement by watching the shopping channel on TV, playing cards, queueing up for early-bird dinners, and, on Holy days, sharing the outrage of conservative evangelical bloviators railing against '*government campaigns aimed at curtailing religious liberties*' while proclaiming divine indications of the coming of the 'end times' (*eschaton*).

Clearly, it was time for Adam to get to work on effective measures to curb humanity's runaway population explosion by ending the continuing spread of Knowledge, medical and scientific.

'Go forth,' God ordered Adam, 'and stop humanity from doing anything but worshipping Me.'

Adam was ready and eager, macho, despite not having the slightest vestige of a strategic program.

For some arcane reason, Adam asked to take his gardening helpmate, Eve, along on his mission.

God, at first, demurred, then, relented. He never really was comfortable having her around, consorting with serpents and all that.

It was dark, but they could hear the jingle of the approaching custodian's keys. It was almost as if they had never been away.

Adam used his iPhone to summon a nearby Lyft.

BOOK II: The Kitchen in Hell

7. Are We Crazy?

Did We Just Leave Paradise?

Back in their New York City greystone, our now-conflicted couple considered whether their respective memories of their extraordinary experiences in Cincinnati's Paradise were merely illusions.

Had they really spoken to and, ultimately, contracted with God to serve as His agents for undermining the world's Knowledge? Had they petted dinosaurs and held conversations with a talking snake? With whom could they share their improbable story without being committed to the psychiatric ward at Bellevue?

Perhaps, they should simply put these vivid imaginings behind them and return to the everyday working chaos that their twenty-first century urban lives had previously offered.

Then came the cryptic e-mail on Adam's Apple:

"I'm waiting!"

No amount of post-Paradisical rationalizing was going to negate this nascent nightmare.

They were on a mission from God.

Still, they had no plan. They also didn't have any financial resources, influential allies or business cards, Most of all, they had no plan.

Couldn't God have foreseen this? Didn't He recognize that they were merely manipulative frauds - with motivations considerably less pure than Early Adam and Early Eve? Could God be cuckolded a second time?

No. God was not fooled by their clumsy deception. Adam and Eve would be among His improbable tools for herding the world's populace back toward unquestioning faith, divine ignorance and celestial redemption.

God Knew that both Adam and Eve worked on Wall Street. (Actually, Broad Street.); that they had first met as stock brokers; that they were well schooled, computer literate, familiar with technical analyses of stock market trends, ...

They understood metrics. They marketed derivatives.

No. God was no fool. It was Adam and Eve, their financial clients, and, indeed, all humans, - sinners from the moment of birth, - that were the fools.

8. Meeting with the Antichrist

Almost every workday at 11:40 a.m., Adam and Eve joined in the marbled lobby and walked to the *Gristedes Chock Full o’Nuts* on Maiden Lane to purchase lunch.

There, they would stand in a disordered queue three rows deep and shuffle forward until they approached the counter where they would order Kosher sandwiches and soft drinks.

Thus provided, they would carry their unbleached, brown lunch bags back to their office cafeteria and scurry to find seating at a table as it was being vacated.

Today was different.

Surprisingly, there was only one other customer waiting at the Chock Full o’Nuts when they arrived.

Behind the glass-covered countertop, the white uniformed attendant smiled at them almost as if she recognized them from their innumerable previous luncheon forays.

Later, neither Adam nor Eve could recall having seen or talked to her before. (Rarely, do New Yorkers establish personal relationships with those who provide them menial services in the press of contemporary urban humanity.)

Today was different. There was an unaccustomed quiet in the shop; a calm moment allowing for banter. Eve even had time to note her server's white Lucite corporate name tag. Luci was animated and amusing as she scurried to fill their orders.

As the couple unwrapped their sandwiches back at their corporate cafeteria, Eve found a note folded in her brown (unbleached) napkin. Written in elaborate cursive on a piece of flame red paper, this clandestine message included an address, in Hell's Kitchen, no less.

The message read: *"I can help! Your friend, Luci."*

In a genuine panic, the pair awkwardly excused themselves from work for the afternoon. Adam and Eve then briskly ascended from their six-foot by six-foot carrels on the sixth below-grade floor of their sixty six story office building.

As they rode the Broadway-7th Avenue Local subway toward 86th Street and Central Park West, they were both in a state of almost uncontrollable anxiety.

Luci Knows? Luci can help? Flame red paper? Hell's Kitchen? Was this a diabolical exemplification of demonic humor?

Had God already forsaken them and consigned them to a heinous eternity within the frozen ninth level of Hell for their treachery and impotence?

After the beep, Luci's cheery voice emanated in tinny resonance from their AT&T answering machine. Luci proposed to meet with them in her 543 West 49th Street kitchen, between 10th and 11th Avenues, that very evening. Adam and Eve were dumbstruck, terrified, discombobulated.

They agreed. No way in Hell.

"How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. 'But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: 'Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a wilderness, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?'"

Lucifer, Morning Star, Bringer of Light,
and Lilith, the Seductress, his Consort.

9. The Kitchen in Hell

Strangely, both Adam and Eve felt even more terrified at the prospect of not following Luci's directives.

Adding to their alarm was Eve's observation that she thought Luci spoke with a pronounced, lilting brogue strongly reminiscent of Lilith's.

They would hire a taxicab -- and pay the driver to wait.

The West 49th Street courtyard was lined with trash bags and cans emitting that odor New Yorkers associate with multi-day-old garbage. The rusty, galvanized, garbage can lids appeared to be crushed inward from having served as seating for the building superintendent and other idle attendants.

(There are no janitors In New York City; only '*Supers.*')

Inside the entryway, the pair encountered the odor of fermenting wine grapes from the basement which followed them up the stairwell to the second floor.

At the landing, Luci stood - waiting at her open door.

Adam bravely entered first. A short hallway led, indeed, to the kitchen where an east-facing window provided a view of an adjacent brick wall but one metre distant. Floored with linoleum, the kitchen contained a wooden icebox; a potbellied, coal-burning stove; an old-fashioned kitchen table with four tattered vinyl-covered chairs; and a large, raised, enameled bathtub immediately adjacent to the sink in which an open water faucet ran continuously.

In addition to these bizarre circumstances, Adam was made still more uncomfortable by the premonition that he had just stepped back more than a half-century in time.

Alternately, Luci was bright, cheerful, seemingly even playful, but businesslike. Without preamble, she pointed her guests to the chairs while explaining that she understood their situation. They were not to be anxious since she had formed an alliance, albeit unholy, with God. She had agreed to assist Him in implementing His program to conquer their common enemy, - Knowledge.

Luci informed them that God had stipulated that the three should work in concert together.

Luci went on to explain, in a reassuring tone, that she was entirely supportive of God's effort to mitigate the impact that Knowledge continued to impose on humankind. Scientists, she explained, were constantly devising effective methodologies for combatting disease and improving both the quality and length of human life.

Luci apparently lamented the fact that, in so many respects, people were leading not only longer, but happier lives. Moreover, the iPad mini with Retina display, which had just been introduced to the broad consumer market, would only further increase human access to *'content'*.

Knowledge was rampant and gaining momentum through electronic media transport.

Finally, Luci noted with satisfaction that, if, as God had ordained, only the holy and God-fearing were enabled to return to Eden, then, a far, far greater number of soiled souls would soon be on their way to severely overpopulate and further aggravate the already undesirable conditions she had established in Hell.

It was clearly a win-lose situation.

Luci glowed at the prospect. Adam thought her rather pert and fetching.

From the start, Eve resented Luci's involvement in their quest. Eve both feared and mistrusted her. She had deceitful eyes. She was too chatty. She wasted water.

Besides, who needed her help? Whose concept was this project anyway? What made Luci think she could be more effective than God's select dynamic duo in devising an effective, but humane, means for insuring the eradication of Knowledge?

And yes, Luci was pretty - which didn't simplify matters.

How come God hadn't selected a man for this task?

As God's anointed duo walked back to the curb outside the tenement building, they saw that their cab, along with their \$50, was gone.

10. Drafting a Blueprint for the Death of Knowledge

Instinctively, the indefatigable Luci knew.

As she strapped on her push-up bra for their strategy meeting that following morning, Luci was certain that Adam would be easy to co-opt. Knowledge had left him, not so much with ideas, as with basic desires.

Eve, on the other hand, promised to be exasperatingly difficult and uncooperative.

Among other things, Eve was likely to introduce unnecessary complexity into their planning; namely, the issue of morality.

Eve was truly righteous and felt obligations to both God and humanity. She was maternal and peace-loving. Eve could substantially limit Luci's range of preferred options for destroying Knowledge.

Most of Luci's most basic tools were devilishly inhumane. She invariably voted for warmongers and proudly displayed her NRA life membership pin.

Even Luci's pet goldfish had died for lack of watering.

God's conspirators met at Adam's well-appointed *Central Park West* apartment and sat down to black coffee, bagels with cream cheese, and orange juice.

From the start, the triangulating trio did agree that the destruction of Knowledge might take some time. Peremptorily, however, Eve rejected any consideration of those time-honored, but inhumane, population control measures threatened in the *Book of Revelation*.

In particular, three of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Conquest, War, and Death, sounded very much alike to her.

As a Jew, she particularly disliked what she viewed as the Christian vision of the coming apocalypse. It seemed nasty, brutal and mean-spirited.

Knowledge, alone, was their target. When Knowledge was firmly vanquished, population, along with political and environmental issues, should begin to fade.

Meanwhile, Adam admired Luci's cleavage. He thought he could see the arcs of her areolae. Three times, he hovered over her to pour orange juice.

Only Eve was counting.

Obviously, Adam's diversions would not escape Eve. For her, his behavior was becoming an irritating distraction and complicating their preparations.

Even so, his typically male response, Eve reasoned, might actually furnish a pivotal key to the development of a plan for the destruction of Knowledge.

In short, porn.

11. Shaping The Plan

Even as Eve began to articulate her nascent thoughts, Luci was quick to join in to reinforce and extend her formulations. The two were like-minded and in total agreement. God had chosen his warriors well.

Luci revealed that she could muster substantial resources to aid in the implementation of their conspiracy.

Along with liquid financial assets, Luci, perhaps not surprisingly, held sway over a small army of compliant advertising executives, bankers, political figures, media personalities, and, for the most part, 'conservative' journalists.

She explained that she also had obligated the favors of a major segment of the preachers, televangelists and most influential religious leaders throughout the world.

Seemingly, in pursuit of their personal ambitions, these avid interpreters of God's will had all previously negotiated special, inscrutable arrangements with her.

As the plan evolved, the roles keyed to the special talents and influence of those indebted to Luci fell into place. With the monetarily assured concurrence of world governments, the trio would coordinate the efforts of their influential cabal to create an *international communications organization network (ICON)*.

This service would primarily be devoted to marketing pornography - in all its cryptic guises.

To facilitate its broad adoption, the ICON network's global programming would be distributed free to all.

Besides providing an unparalleled array of exciting and provocative entertainment, ICON's political programming would be designed to induce and exacerbate fears, generate mistrust in established authority, and project apocalyptic interpretations of emerging world events.

For the female demographic, there would be interludes of very soft core pornography along with the exploration of sexual phobias.

The network's most disquieting video content would both create and magnify the portrayals of terrorist threats.

Horror and angst, combined with the ultimate promise of sexual gratification, would dominate ICON programming, thereby creating a divine driving force aimed at compelling viewers worldwide to seek sanctuary and satisfaction under God's benevolent protection.

Sex would capture the audience. Panic and fear would create the need for God's salvation.

And Adam would get to oversee the programatic offerings.

12. God's Network - ICON

In relatively short order, the conspirators believed, with the technical assistance of redundant NASA engineers and the purchased accommodations of complaisant governments, God's earthly acolytes would be able to arrange for the launching of several advanced communications satellites, including one strategically placed in polar orbit.

These communication satellites would serve to beam the network's designated programming to all inhabited regions of the world using a variety of nominally separate news and entertainment sources, thus creating the illusion of intense internecine media competition.

Unfettered by commercial breaks, censors, or advertisers insistent on product placement and face time, ICON's channels could provide continuous, unexpurgated content.

Sports channels would offer sports fans an unmatched medley of live sports events tailored to the provincial interests in each viewer's region.

Outcomes could even be adjusted to exacerbate rivalries, maximize dissension, and, more important, generate fear, hatred and, ultimately, despair.

Still other channels would target those most fervent religionists who revel in being alternately appalled and outraged at the content being viewed by the hedonistic devotees of the other porn-ridden channels,

.... at least until their spouses had gone to bed.

In this manner, ICON's overall enterprise could be construed as *'balanced and fair'*.

Awarded the role of production manager, Adam would enthusiastically oversee preparation of the entertaining, beguiling and salacious content of each 24-hour program guide with a connoisseur's eye.

Book III: Finding Knowledge

13: Earth's Kernel of Knowledge

Unaware that it had become an issue in the Kingdom of God, Knowledge sat in a library corral at *The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art*, thumbing through a calculus textbook as he anxiously waited for his first date.

Mustering all his courage, Knowledge had asked her to meet him after class, perhaps, to go out for a bite. In the confusion and excitement that accompanied her unanticipated acceptance, he even forgot to ask her name.

Not that he would have necessarily remembered.

Now she approached, wearing paint-stained jeans and flat-soled sandals. He leaped up precipitously, dropping his yellow felt-tip highlighter.

She had braids. She was smiling. He loved her.

Mary opted for just a quick snack and water at *McSorley's Old Ale House*. Only a block distant, she could scurry back in time for an evening sketching workshop. If Knowledge was consistently awkward and flustered, Mary was poised and composed. Seemingly, their rendezvous lasted but minutes before Mary reached for her backpack.

Before separating, Knowledge did remember to ask for her cell phone address. He was good at numbers.

Back in the library, Knowledge would strangely encounter yet another young woman that evening. Unexpected and unknown, she confidently strode to the table where his papers and books were neatly stacked and abruptly sat down across from him. Then, without preamble, she simply introduced herself.

She would be applying for admission to the School of Engineering and wondered if she should opt for electrical or chemical engineering. However, as an avid environmentalist, might civil engineering be a more appropriate career choice?

Knowledge was flummoxed. It was only later, as he reflected on these events, that it occurred to him that this was a very curious circumstance. Why would his new acquaintance, Luci, elect to consult him, a stranger, concerning her personal career options?

He did put forth several criteria for her consideration, but, ultimately, he recommended that she talk to the Dean of Engineering who he knew to be a very agreeable and accessible administrator.

Even so, without prompting, Luci had provided him with both her telephone number and home address. The latter was conveniently located for a potential Cooper student, just adjacent to Washington Square Park.

Still, he thought, as Luci strode purposely toward the staircase, she shouldn't be too sure she would gain admission.

14. Hail, Mary

Following his Friday afternoon laboratory class, Knowledge dallied outside the art studio to which he had escorted Mary the previous evening. Today's drawing class was still in session, so he squatted on the stairway floor to await its dismissal. It occurred to

Knowledge that art classes didn't appear to end the same way engineering classes did. Students straggled out one, two, three at a time over a period of about ten minutes, he inferred.

Finally, out came Mary. She smiled at him warmly. She walked towards him. Life was good.

After a pleasant stroll through Washington Square Park, Mary and Knowledge descended the steps into the Blue Hill restaurant to dine in the kind of quiet, elegant comfort that is notably costly in the Big Apple.

They really knew very little about each other's lifestyles. Each was experiencing very different academic routines within the confines of a very small college. As they chatted and shared anecdotes, it seemed ever more obvious that they liked each other.

Mary ordered an organic vegetarian meal and opted for iced tea with lemon as opposed to wine. Knowledge had the pork roast along with a stein of draft beer.

On being served her meal, Mary silently prayed. This somewhat unnerved Knowledge, a closet atheist.

As they were considering the prospects for dessert, an intrusion occurred that Knowledge found most unsettling.

A cheerful Luci approached their table and began expressing her appreciation for the counsel he had given her the previous evening.

She had followed up with a fruitful visit to the Dean of Engineering. She would offer her credentials for admission to the College of Engineering to study civil and environmental engineering.

Adding to Knowledge's dismay, Mary invited Luci to sit down and share her story.

Knowledge heard barely a word as Luci and Mary discussed Luci's initiative, ambitions, and her prospects for admission. In fact, he was astounded at how upset he had allowed himself to become now that his idyllic rendezvous with Mary had been usurped in this manner.

His precious time alone with Mary meant a great deal to him. For her encroachment and unwarranted intrusion, he truly resented Luci.

Besides which, there was something about Luci ...

He discarded Luci's telephone number and address from his memory.

15. The Plan for Faith's Triumph

As it devolved, the triumvirates scheme for corralling knowledge fused into to just the four basic elements.

Air would involve the development and utilization of modern global satellite communication technology.

This would provide access to all human minds through their use of multimedia: television, radio, internet, smart phones, CD, DVD, beta VHS, ..., plus social media, the voices of influential sports and political figures, clergy, local pundits, regional dictators, provocateurs, and demagogues, ..., whatever means and whoever was available for the transmission of those messages that would capture the attention - and allow ICON to enter the fertile, pleasure-seeking minds - of the global populace.

Water would be contaminated with an infectious agent designed to, at the designated activation signal from ICON's satellites, trigger a knowledge-debilitating and, ultimately, fatal assault on the human brain.

Independently, Luci proposed to recruit her most enterprising and compromised cadre of the world's foremost biological scientists to develop a genetically modified virus - one that she referred to as the '*ignorance virus (IV)*.'

The *ignorance virus* would be inserted into each human as part of her diabolical design for inactivating their ability to continue utilizing their ill-gotten knowledge.

Eve sharply recoiled at Luci's scheme to develop a cruel and sadistic infectious agent, - but Adam, enthused with this manly, Machiavellian approach, championed it. How cool?

Earth currently provided the sustenance for an estimated seven billion people (and almost that number of souls). Its fruitful bounty of food and water would provide the means for distributing the *ignorance virus*.

While the trio agreed that the earth, itself, should be preserved, they conjectured that its role as a habitat for humanity would likely end as soon as the masses, freshly liberated from knowledge, were fully ignoranticized. It would then be up to God to redirect their spirits to the appropriate domain of His final judgment.

Some to Eden; most to Hell.

Fire? ... Well, Luci would take care of that.

16. Knowledge Unchained

Meanwhile, our symbolic kernel, Knowledge, was slavishly ministering to the demands of his senior year as an electrical engineering student at The Cooper Union. His muse, Mary, had become his sole diversion.

Escapism and entertainment would have to be held in abeyance until after the day he would don his rented cap and gown and descend into Peter Cooper's venerable Great Hall for his graduation ceremony.

However, graduation promised to greatly complicate matters in their emerging romantic relationship. Both he and Mary had critical choices to make. Each of them envisioned embarking on a fulfilling and creative career that would fully capitalize the investment they had made in their education. (This was, primarily, of talent, time, and effort as there had been no student tuition at The Cooper Union during their tenure.)

Knowledge entertained the urge to join the Peace Corps for a time - to contribute to technical development somewhere in the third world. Mary hoped for a scholarship that would allow her to visit the cathedrals and great art centers of Europe.

The couple would adjoin to a quiet restaurant to discuss their preferred trajectories -- if not possible separation.

Not far from the Battery Park in New York City, on Pearl Street, in the heart of the bustling financial district, is a historic American restaurant, Fraunces Tavern *'since 1762.'*

Knowledge suggested to Mary that they, first, take a leisurely Sunday morning stroll along the waterfront through Battery Park, then, enjoy a quiet luncheon at the venerable Tavern which had once hosted George Washington as he made his historic *'farewell address'*.

Accordingly, after a pleasant morning stroll during which the couple talked of *'cabbages and kings'*, they entered the Tavern hand-in-hand.

The couple were seated at a comfortable window table for two where they could view the foot traffic on the narrow streets leading from the financial district when a smiling Luci bustled toward them holding outsized menus.

"How nice to see you!", Luci gushed as she clutched her burden to her bosom.

Stunned, the ever-apprehensive Knowledge was struck with the foreboding that his precious time with Mary was again about to be usurped.

With their impending graduations, he had carefully prepared himself for a very serious - and very private - conversation with Mary about their possible future together.

The improbable appearance of the voluble Luci brought him to near-panic.

Suddenly, he had to pee, - badly. At the same time, he was fearful of leaving Mary alone. He would wait to excuse himself until after they had placed their orders and Luci had returned to the recesses of the Tavern.

It wasn't going to be that easy. In the near-empty restaurant, Luci and Mary engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the issues of the day:

the motivation of the Occupiers of Zuccoti Park;
the pageantry of this year's Saint Patrick's Day Parade;
the remarkable success of the musical, The Book of Mormon; ...

By the time their luncheon orders were finally placed, Knowledge had absentmindedly emptied his water glass and was literally *fit to burst.*'

It was only after the couple had left the Tavern and were walking along Pearl Street toward the Brooklyn Bridge that Knowledge again began to work up the courage to broach the crucial conversation he had diligently prepared himself for.

In his imagination, he had rehearsed his responses to all contingencies in hopes of ardently making his case.

Unexpectedly, Mary preempted him.

While he was voiding (a full litre, he estimated), the ever-helpful Luci confided to Mary that the loving pair seemed destined to, first, join the Peace Corps and , then, travel overseas to serve humanity together.

And so, it had been, not his, but Luci's proposal that resonated with Mary and led her to agree to unite with Knowledge.

17. A Catholic Marriage

Blest in Carnal Ignorance

Theirs was a traditional Irish Catholic wedding. It included green flowers, handfasting, and the exchange of Claddagh rings that consist of two hands holding a heart, with a crown on top. (In Irish legend, the crown represents loyalty, the hands indicate friendship, and the heart stands for the couple's love for each other.)

In addition to Jameson's Irish whiskey, the wedding celebrants imbibed mead made with honey (a practice thought to have spawned the term *'honeymoon'*, indicating the time the couple spends together after the wedding.)

The wedding feast consisted of corned beef, cabbage, potatoes and soda bread. Fruitcake, topped with whipped cream, was served for dessert.

By modern standards, the wedding was a comparatively modest affair. Mary chose to wear a bridal gown made of Irish linen that had been handed down from her maternal grandmother.

Her light red hair was simply braided. Plus, she eschewed many of the costly modern wedding rituals and adornments; opting, instead, for the long-held Irish traditions of carrying a lucky (in this case, ceramic) horseshoe and discretely embedding a *'magic*

handkerchief' inside her floral bouquet. (Irish tradition held that this handkerchief would adorn the couple's first-born on its Christening day.)

All the guests were provided with small silver bells which they pealed throughout the ceremony. These would later be brought home and tinkled whenever a domestic dispute - obviously caused by evil spirits - needed to be 'disbelled'. In this respect, the tiny bell served as an aural reminder of their wedding vows.

For his part, Knowledge was in disarray.

He offered no input - more particularly, no resistance - to any of the wedding plans. Largely out of fear of losing Mary's favor, he failed to remember to advise her about his own deeply imbedded beliefs - or what she might interpret as 'disbeliefs'.

Knowledge trusted solely in clinical observation, undergirded by the scientific method, as the sole foundation for finding truth. The improbable, ancient, mythological practice of petitioning invisible deities to bestow fertility, good health, and eternal life, was incomprehensible to him.

He was in fear of telling Mary that he did not believe in her or, for that matter, anyone's God?

Compounding his deception by omission was Knowledge's virginal fear of impending intimacy.

Shy and lacking social graces, he had remarkably little experience in communicating with contemporary young women (a.k.a., girls).

Knowledge was deeply concerned that he could not fathom their thinking or effectively stimulate their emotions. Despite a deep attraction and fertile imagination, he was only dimly aware of their hidden anatomy. (Whimsically, one could argue, he lacked - *knowledge*.)

Nevertheless, despite painful ignorance and self-doubt, if all went well, Knowledge would soon find himself alone, abed, with a naked bride.

He had made an effort to prepare himself for this adventure. The very week that Knowledge became betrothed and purchased Mary's diamond engagement ring, he also consulted Amazon and ordered a lightly used copy of the *Kama Sutra*.

On careful reading, Knowledge noted that, in addition to its written detailing of sixty-four sexual acts and positions, the manuscript also addressed a number of profound philosophical issues relating to the '*acquisition of knowledge*'.

His was also an illustrated edition.

The wedding took place in the venerable Saint Brigid's Roman Catholic Church in New York's *'East Village'*.

The historic church building had been constructed, starting in 1848, by Irish shipwrights as a sanctuary for those fleeing the great Irish famine.

For her reputed tender and welcoming nature, over time, Saint Brigid became the patron saint of babies, blacksmiths, boatmen, cattle, chicken farmers, children whose parents are not married, dairymaids, dairy workers, fugitives, Ireland, mariners, midwives, nuns, poets, printing presses, scholars, and travelers.

The formal rituals completed and the guests both feted and sated, our freshly-minted married couple retreated to the bridal suite at the nearby Bowery Hotel.

Between themselves, in weeks to come, they would recall that first night together as both *'awkward'* and *'awesome'* as they diligently embarked upon a journey to develop their own mastery of carnal (in the most noble, spiritual, and practical sense of the word) knowledge.

"Practice" Well, you know.

18. Peace Corps Recruits

As their honeymoon destination, our altruistic couple elected Washington, D.C. Much of their motivation for choosing the nation's Capitol was to lobby for a rewarding, humanitarian assignment with the Peace Corps.

Although wedded couples were not always selected to serve at overseas posts, Mary and Knowledge hoped several factors would act in their favor.

To begin with, in the Peace Corps, knowledgeable - and readily marketable - engineers were always in short supply.

Secondly, the couple was asking to be assigned to any of the poorest and most needy regions of Africa, perhaps, Tanzania or Kenya.

Finally, Mary was a linguist; conversant in both Spanish and French; capable in Italian. She had also served as a volunteer substitute teacher in a south Bronx public school, a rigorous training ground if there ever was one.

Theirs was an offer the Peace Corps recruiter couldn't refuse.

Two weeks of orientation (a.k.a., indoctrination) in Washington had to be endured before Knowledge and Mary would be launched into a truly meaningful program of practical instruction.

Thereafter, our adventurous and altruistic emissaries would be assigned to the *'newly reformed, post-genocidal'* Rwanda.

In preparation, our Peace Corpspersons were commissioned to *'live and learn'* amidst a small Rwandan (in their case, a, primarily, Hutu) community for four months. After acclimatization, they would undertake their designated assignments.

Knowledge was to assist in the implementation of a small-scale solar electrical generation project while Mary would undertake the pivotal training of local, French-speaking, Hutu women who would be entrusted to protect and tend to the solar facility, - if it were, ultimately, ever constructed.

They were on a mission from DOE.

19. Rwanda

Strangely, many called upon Knowledge for medical guidance. In the villagers' minds, most male foreigners were thought to be physicians, some belonging to *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Doctors without Borders), - or their equivalent.

Nevertheless, the villagers were satisfied to learn that this devoted couple would be staying among them until an '*electricity plant*' had been constructed and entrusted to their care.

Meanwhile, a Tutsi woman in a nearby village informed Mary that there was to be a large '*genocide commemoration ceremony*' (*kwibuka*, or '*remember*') to be held in the Amahoro Stadium at Kigali.

President Paul Kagame, himself, would preside as part of Rwanda's '*mourning week*', an annual ritual that cruelly reopens the wounds and reawakens the bitterness and hatreds of the regions brutal 1994 internecine slaughter.

The Peace Corps Americans were invited.

The ceremony would include a dramatic telling of Rwandan history. Performed by no less than 630 performers, dancers and musicians, Rwanda's native pre-colonial society is portrayed as being uprooted through exploitation by dehumanizing, pith-helmeted white colonizers - who, perhaps symbolically, later don U.N.-blue berets.

Still later in the grisly annual narrative, depicting events recorded just twenty years ago, a reconstruction of the world's most virulent and gruesome genocide begins in earnest.

Most incomprehensible of all, this persecution and extermination of Rwanda's minority Tutsi's had been planned and executed by its very own state government.

The reenactment of the savage, helter-skelter destruction of 800,000 men, women and children, - largely by their neighbors, - with machetes, hammers, clubs, knives, hoes, and firearms over a mere 100 days, is dramatized by the host of performers and increasingly accompanied by an influx of hysterically screaming and thrashing audience participants.

At the end of the simulated carnage, Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) soldiers rush into the stadium to lift up the agonized, screaming, writhing and dying, as if to restore them to life.

By any benchmark, these ceremonial tableaux were compelling recreations of the agonies of hell on earth.

Living among the traumatized Rwandans served as a potent education for our dedicated, compassionate, and naive duo.

They weren't in the Big Apple anymore.

To this day, they found that, among Rwanda's divided tribes, poverty, illness, hunger, fear, mysticism, and hopelessness continued to remain daily challenges.

Yet, many Rwandans were young, innocent, and playful. Fully half had been born since the tragic onslaught of the genocide.

Most of the older half literally bore the wounds, scars, and heartbreaking memories of lost families and their own desperate struggle to remain alive and sane.

In time, the shipment of solar panels, inverters, wiring and mounting supplies arrived, along with a few storage batteries.

Knowledge set about his installation task eagerly. He and Mary would work tirelessly and compassionately to make a positive difference in the lives of the villagers.

Some of the first items to appear in the newly electrified community were radios; then, from somewhere, a flat panel television set.

As an unintended byproduct of their efforts, it would not be long before the natives in the region accessed - and learned to favor - the ICON network.

Book IV: Launch of the ICON

20: Religious Art in Italy

It wasn't every Peace Corps team that toiled in this massively traumatized region that ultimately fulfilled their humanitarian assignment - or even persisted through its full, year-long, term.

The intrinsic kindness and sincere empathy displayed by Knowledge and Mary had served them well in enlisting the affection, cooperation, and labor of the Rwandan villagers.

And, indeed, the task did take a village.

Having successfully completed the solar electrical power installation and ancillary operational training program, our resolute couple were commended by the Peace Corps administrator for Rwanda - and granted a month's leave before being offered their next assignment.

Mary had long had her heart set on visiting the illustrious arts centers of Italy.

The duo elected to spend their time, first, in and around Florence and Siena in Tuscany; then, they would indulge the Eternal City, Roma.

Almost upon arrival, our intrepid tourists excitedly joined the throngs in waiting to explore the *Basilica of Saint Mary of the Flower* (*Il Duomo di Firenze*).

Knowledge marveled at the complexity of the structural design and mused on the difficulties encountered by the builders as they struggled to overcome gravity in setting the immense columns and stonework, especially considering the limits of Renaissance construction tools and methodologies.

Knowledge accompanied Mary as she feasted on the celebrated historic artwork housed in the Uffizi Gallery.

She practiced her craft by making quick charcoal sketches of Michelangelo's *David and Prisoners*, Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabines*, and Botticelli's *Madonna and Child* as well as *The Madonna of the Sea*.

As they explored these magnificent treasures, it became evident that Mary enjoyed an extensive knowledge of both the artists and the biblical depictions in their artwork.

Knowledge was impressed. He had almost no concept of the magnitude of human effort that had gone into the creation of these revered religious edifices and artworks.

Further, he was continually astounded that so many great artists had seemingly given genuine credence to the mythological tales they were illustrating.

Alternately, Mary accompanied Knowledge on extended tours of the Galileo and the Leonardo Da Vinci museums where he regaled her with mini-lectures on the scientific principles that were being studied or unearthed during this seminal period of intellectual awakening.

Knowledge also noted, barely suppressing his satisfaction, that the middle finger from Galileo's right hand was exhibited at the *Museo Galileo*.

"Eppur si muove" ('*And yet it moves!*') - Galileo.

The young lovers found ‘*Roma Capitale*’ to be romantic, awe-inspiring and dynamic. Knowledge found the architectural masterpieces of *St Peter's Basilica*, the *Sistine Chapel*, *Raphael Rooms* and *St. Peter's Square*, even the catacombs carved into volcanic tuff, breathtaking.

Mary filled sketchpads with pastel renderings of classic art, including that of the *Sistine Chapel*.

But, the travelers needed to be careful with their euros. Vacationing in Italy was astronomically expensive by their norms, particularly after living in Rwanda’s desperate economy.

However, for a finale, they would treat themselves to a fine dinner at one of Roma’s peerless restaurants, in sight of the famous *Trevi Fountain*.

They had placed their orders (‘*Carciofi alla giudia*’ for Knowledge and ‘*Gnocchi di semolino alla romana*’ for Mary) and were contemplating the ebb of flow of the tide of strolling pedestrians when, unexpectedly, a now-familiar voice sang out.

“*What a surprise to find you here?*”

Luci's ensemble and hat resembled those of Audrey Hepburn's in *'Roman Holiday'* as she strode confidently toward them.

Knowledge was far more than surprised. He recoiled.

As Mary and Luci pleasantly exchanged updates, they would learn that Luci had *'dropped out'* of engineering school and was now employed in helping to organize a philanthropic global communications network.

Italian technology was *'highly developed'* and the Italian government, *'with proper guarantees and incentives'*, would be instrumental in fully implementing this new educational system so that all its citizens could enjoy its benefits *'without cost or restriction to access'*.

None of Luci's altruistic rhetoric made practical - or economic - sense to Knowledge.

He was greatly relieved when she finally took her leave and melted into the crowd of cell phone photographers surrounding the Fountain.

Still, he felt strangely chilled by an indefinable sense of impending upheaval.

21: Launch of ICON

Luci, Eve, and, yes, even Adam, had made substantial progress over the past year in establishing relationships with key administrators in the (nominally 200) countries throughout the world which would host the International Communications Organization Network.

All three agreed that it was essential that cordial relationships be established with national leaders to ensure that ICON's messaging would not only be unimpeded but, instead, be earnestly promoted by the principal spokespersons and loudest and most influential mouthpieces of each regime.

In addition to delivering a free public service for which enabling political figureheads could claim credit, it was evident from the start that all the corrupt leaders and powerful bureaucratic facilitators would need to be regularly proffered a *'piece of candy'*.

These facilitators would, in turn, encourage their recruits to serve as active supporters of the new global network so that it would ultimately, reach earth's entire population. In concert, these local spokespersons would help ICON speak the common languages, overcome the barriers of regional idioms, and capitalize on the deep-seated provincial biases of their many and diverse target audiences.

Luci undertook to proffer to each participant the appropriate '*candy*' (money, power, prestige, notoriety, sexual favors, ...). Without fail, her quarry would seize it.

Eve became increasingly concerned regarding the ethics of Luci's implementation of their plan. She was continually astonished at the quanta of resources Luci was able to access to implement such an enormous undertaking. Most disturbing of all, Eve felt that Luci had effectively seized complete control of their enterprise.

For his part, Adam thought things were going just fine.

Within months of its inauguration, the content-rich and, did we mention, cost-free, multi-faceted ICON network had attracted a large segment of the globe's CRT and flat-panel television, computer screen, cell phone, iPod, iPad, and other tablet viewers - along with most of its less advantaged radio listeners.

ICON's ubiquitous, satellite-borne electromagnetic waves left few eyes or ears unattended.

Religious proselytizers and charitable aid agencies were provided with unlimited numbers of free, battery-operated radios, programmed to exclusively receive ICON content.

Worldwide, these purveyors of virtue distributed these devices liberally, even among impoverished scavengers and in isolated subsistence communities.

Surveys confirmed that people were now spending more of their waking, as well as working, hours facing their respective screens and auditing their speakers. Media consultants of all nationalities were hard at work determining how better to seduce - or '*incentivize*' - those who were not already current network viewers and listeners.

The cost of entry - *free* - created no barrier.

The communications consultant's diligent efforts resulted in a constant reformatting and tweaking of a deliciously insidious and salacious menu of incendiary, provocative and pious programming.

For the more refractory viewers, new channels, offering ever more arcane - or tailored - content, were introduced.

Once each new demographic audience was secured, ICON's underlying messages could be realigned and integrated into the programming.

These messages would create a hunger - no, a passion among true believers - for the advent of the Apocalypse - to be culminated with each petitioner's deserved salvation by God.

Immanentize the Eschaton!

It would not take long before almost everyone on Earth would come under the dominating influence of God's network - subliminally issuing its requirements for each soul's preparation for redemption.

Only then, after proper acculturation of each human brain to develop cell surface receptors for the newly-created '*Ignorance Virus*', could its massive global insertion and assault on knowledge begin.

Thereafter, the Last Judgement Day would be nigh.

22: China - Satellite and Technical Support

Luci's influence in the People's Republic of China (PRC) was both extensive and profound, particularly among those entrepreneurs whose economic activities benefited most from the exploitation of the labor of the poverty-stricken peasants surging from the agricultural interior of the nation to its rapidly industrializing urban centers.

With Luci's strategic and discreet help, the PRC had already become the world's leader in the production of technologically advanced manufactured goods. Therefore, the PRC was the best positioned candidate for the development, production, launch and operational guidance of the orbiting satellites needed to spread the messages of ICON.

Major space for ICON programming became available on TIANGONG I, China's first manned space station module. With over one billion cellphone, internet and broadband users, accessing more than twice the national bandwidth of the United States, the Chinese population was well-equipped - and conditioned - to ingest ICON programming and propaganda.

Seemingly more humbly, but no less important, Chinese factories were poised to produce millions of inexpensive ICON radios and television sets for impoverished nations throughout Africa, Asia and South America.

23: Korea-Animated Entertainment

Next stop: South Korea! Home of South Park, Family Guy, ...

There are 120 animation studios in South Korea. Their booming workload is such that they reportedly subcontract some of their workload to North Korea.

Overcoming language barriers worldwide is notably difficult and complex. Accordingly, God's conspirators strategy for ICON programming included using visual cues and presentations wherever possible.

Movies, cartoon series, visual games -- could all be reconfigured for the most diverse audience imaginable. Even *Laurel & Hardy* slapstick movies would again become global favorites.

Book V: Ascent of the Saved (and Damned)

24. Ascent of the Saved

Finally, the day of redemption was at hand - at least, seemingly, for the impassioned flock of the faithful.

If exit polling had been possible, we might have learned that the percentage of the world's population anticipating redemption for a life well lived might have been remarkably high, exceeding 99% among fervent '*right-to-lifers*' and other religious zealots.

Alternately, the eschaton would mean damnation and condemnation to an eternity in hell for the rest of humankind, - or, as it turns out, most of us.

Delivered throughout the entire world via public drinking water supplies, packaged beverages, genetically-modified Frankenfoods, including rice, wheat, corn, beans, sugar, and seafood - plus a full range of dietary staples and medical necessities, including wine, whiskey, beer, steroids, opioids, and Viagra - the ignorance virus (IV) had been globally distributed and virtually universally ingested.

Of course, there were a few escapees: recluses, hermits, celibates, ascetics, doddering oldsters suffering from skeletal degeneration and dementia, a contingent of the critically ill, a handful of prison inmates on hunger strikes, a small cadre of truly unhypocritical natural (organic) food devotees which included dedicated home gardeners, ... who had somehow eluded the IV particle.

However, when enveloped by the vast stinking residue of the billions of rotting carcasses of the recently ascended - and descended, - these isolated refugees could be expected to ultimately succumb to disease, starvation, predation, global warming, and other earthly scourges. Their eventual departure was just a matter of time.

However, if any epidemiologists had remained to record the events, the progress of IV infection on such a massive global scale would have been cited in journals as unimaginably expeditious.

Even so, the near-total infection of the accumulated mass of humanity spanned a traditionally biblical period of just *‘fourty’* days. Only after that period could God’s summary judgment be offered and the heavenly Ascensions - and hell-bound Descensions - be effectively implemented.

This time detainment was largely a result of the immense diaspora of the malignant neoplasia of human organic substance that the third planet had so far managed to spawn and, more surprisingly, accommodate.

Most of the infected found the cessation of all cerebral functions that sustain independent thought - and creativity - in a living human being to be a rather unpleasant experience.

Alternately, among God's army of true believers, the innate anticipated joy of the prospect of residing at the foot of their Creator, rent and care free for eternity, intellectual death seemed deliriously welcome and fulfilling. In many respects, the majority of these devoted disciples had little to lose anyway.

Moreover, as a Pyrrhic bonus, in the waning moments of their consciousness, *'climate science deniers'* could exult in the fact that the deeply despised Al Gore's cataclysmic predictions had not, technically, come true - although it might have been evident to those who retained some degree of rationality that earth, itself, was well advanced in its inexorable process of becoming incapable of supporting large animal, including human, life.

As for Knowledge, he found that Ascension, itself, was a frightening - or as a toddler might offer, a '*scaree*' - experience.

Instead of light, there was darkness. No sound could be heard and there was no tangible evidence that any other ethereal souls were, similarly, in transit.

Knowledge felt alone and, in some fashion, naked. He had a vague sense that it was dank and chilly. In addition, he found he couldn't breathe.

Not that he had to.

Instead of the prophesied '*Golden Gate*', Knowledge sensed he was crawling along inside a cold, dark sewer. There was no light at the end of this tunnel. There was no heavenly '*bright white light*' to behold; no triumphant blare of angel's trumpets - nor even the distant reverberation of melodious harps.

He could detect no sweet fragrance of holy myrrh, much less of burning gummy frankincense or Axe gel.

Worst of all, there was no tender or consoling caress from Mary to comfort him.

Instead, Knowledge experienced only a gnawing sense of foreboding. He began to entertain a fear of imminent celestial danger and reprisal.

‘What if there really is a God?’

Having yielded life, was Knowledge now heading toward a disagreeable encounter with an unsympathetic - or, worse, - wrathful deity that he had emphatically forsaken?

Even if he had been among the chosen children of God, would he actually have enjoyed living - if the intellectually disabled and deceased can still call it that - in Eden? Would he not then simply be a supplicating, but contented, zombie?

Knowledge had no options. He kept crawling. Adding to his anxieties, the seemingly strenuous effort was not only onerous, but the path seemed, - akin to that of *Sisyphus*, -unending and forever uphill.

And most painful of all, the question that burned within his now illusory breast,

“Where was his beloved Mary?”

25. The Arrival and The Epiphany

Knowledge arrived somewhere as in an awakening. Still, he could see no light. He had no earthly sense of sight, sound, smell or touch. Even so, he sensed the presence of another spirit.

Wordlessly, he queried, “*Who are you?*”

“*I am Jesus.*”, came the ethereal reply.

This response both startled and elated Knowledge, but also gave him pause. What remained of his essence was immediately filled with wonder - and innumerable questions. Could it be that he remained capable of coherent thought or was this pneuma merely an illusion. “*Am I?*”

If any vestige of his heart had remained, he imagined it would have been pounding.

Somehow, somewhere, he appeared to be in contact with Jesus, the alleged Son of God.

“*I am not really God’s son.*”, Jesus preempted. “*In their fervor, the early religious novelists were infelicitous, confounding gospel with orchestrated, but socially and politically beneficial, fantasy. Not that it mattered. At the time, precious few could read. But that series of self-serving opportunists - Paul was, clearly, the worst - kept creating, embellishing and pimping a mythology that has since lasted for millennia.*”

Worse, to continue enjoying the ambiance and freedom of Rome, some of these sycophantic charlatans even attempted to absolve those criminal bastards, - the Romans, - of my crucifixion.

“Then, again, another pundit had me walking on water.

Never happened.

Anyway, what would that prove? ... that I couldn't swim?

“On top of it all, to curry favor with the devout Jews awaiting the arrival of a messiah, anointed by God and physically descended from the Davidic line, one who would rule the united tribes of Israel and herald the Messianic Age of global peace also known as the ‘World to Come’, another fraud concocted an incredibly implausible fabrication that moved my birthplace from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

He had me swaddled in an alien manger and visited by a gaggle of kings bearing gifts.

In actuality, if I was really placed in a manger at birth, it would have been within our very own family hovel in our backwater homestead in Nazareth.

“And, as far as I know, my only birth gift was goat's milk.

“From all the hype, you would have also been taught to believe that I had shown exceptional moral insight plus a keenly-honed intellectual ability. In truth, I was just a simple, inordinately pious and devout Jew.

Still, I like to think I was a compassionate person - at least, by the paltry standards of that savage and brutal time.

“Sad to say, I was never schooled; couldn’t read or write; spoke with a rustic twang; and had scavenged my preaching memes from John, the Baptizer. And like most common folk, aside from that baptism, I never bathed.

“On top to all that, while I earnestly tried, I couldn’t heal worth shit. But then I didn’t charge anything for my shamanism either.

“However, I quickly learned that really sick people will come to you to try anything to regain some vestige of health - especially if the incantations are really, really mystical, impenetrable, - and free.

“One thing that was written about me is sorta true.

“I did rise from the dead - or, at least, appeared to.

“What I think actually happened is ...- I had lost consciousness during my ordeal and hadn’t fully expired during my crucifixion - when my ever-attendant camp followers promptly cut me down.

They fussed and wailed over me until I surprisingly revived and could stand and move about. However, after a few days, infection set in and I went down for the count.

“The whole grisly episode made grist for a really grand exit story in which I was pronounced to have been catapulted into heaven.”

“Are we in heaven, now”, Knowledge queried Jesus, hoping he would turn the lights on.

“Didn’t you understand what I just told you?”, Jesus’ quiddity replied.

“We are both in hell.”

There followed a long hiatus during which Knowledge struggled to make sense of his surroundings.

“I thought I should end up here if such a place existed, Knowledge acknowledged, but why are you here?”

“My whole family; all my relatives: parents, brothers, sisters, - all - have been consigned to this darkness.”

“... but God, your Father? ...”

“My mother recalls being disturbed by a very old, white-bearded man one night when she was yet a girl, but he seemed to be without seed. Besides which, everyone says I have Joseph’s nose ...”

Knowledge had learned enough for the time being - and it was dark.

26. Society of the Damned

Knowledge mused. In retrospect, it was not a surprise that he had been consigned to hell. Throughout life, he had fervently, and it turns out, incorrectly, challenged its actual existence.

But, what, exactly, is hell? Where is the *fire and brimstone*? Knowledge still couldn't sense anything but the presence of other vague presences. He imagined he heard thoughts. He speculated on who might be in hell with him.

He conjured Mark Twain.

"Nice to meet you!", declared Mr. Clemens. "I think you're gonna like it here.

"All the most intriguing people who ever lived have taken up residence in hell - and, needless to say, they have plenty of time to visit and chat. All you gotta do is think of them and ..."

"I can visit with anyone here - just as if they are on the on my cell phone?", Knowledge posited.

“Just so! - only there is no FaceTime here since no one has any tangible senses remaining”, Sam advised.

“Personally, I have found hell to be a pleasant place in many respects.” he added. “Even my dog is here.”

It is hard to believe my good fortune, Knowledge surmised. Hell was ... - well, - not hell.

Over an indeterminate period of time, Knowledge went on to contact many of his favorite people: family, friends, inspirational heroes, great scientists and writers, sports and screen idols...

All those he conjured were here. They were interesting, outspoken and uninhibited. Most of their worldly posturing and pretense had been left behind.

After all, why hold anything back.

We were already in hell.

27. A Chat with the Devil

Nevertheless, Knowledge mourned. The most important person in his life, Mary, was the only one he had repeatedly been unable to contact midst his hellish reveries.

Where was Mary? Had she ascended to Heaven? Or was she still among those living on that monstrous scene of carnage and devastation that now encompassed earth's residuals?

Knowledge decided to try a radical approach. He would conjure his evil nemesis, Luci.

“Good to have you here.”, the voluble Luci chirped. *“You are a particularly fortuitous addition to my realm.”*

“Would you answer some questions for me?”, Knowledge pleaded, anticipating Luci's wrath and recriminations.

“Sure! I will enjoy disabusing you of your idealistic and romantic fantasies.”

“First of all, Where is Mary?”, Knowledge well-nigh begged.

“I don't know. Next!”

“I don’t believe you!”, he impulsively challenged, surprising even himself.

“She’s not here - and I haven’t looked for her elsewhere. It is that simple. If she were here, you would have successfully contacted her yourself since hell dwellers enjoy full ‘spirit access neutrality’ at no extra charge.”

“I might add,” Luci continued proudly, *“that I am inordinately busy now that the essences of most of humanity have descended into my province. By latest count, hell has recruited virtually all of the seven billion, - you might call them, ‘souls’, - as part of our disproportionate harvest of earth’s sentient life.*

“Currently, I am sorting all these ‘soular residuals’ into three groups. While I am very fond of Dante’s concept of the numerous levels of hell, I have decided that nine is too many to administer with appropriate degrees of savagery and cruelty, so I have settled on just three.

My basement (toilet) level contains all those I never want to see, think about, or hear of again. As Dante admonished, ‘Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate’, (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.)

Middle Hell is populated with the great multitude of ordinary sinners, most of whom never recognized or acknowledged that they were sinners at all - even after being confronted with their miserable voting records.

Personally, even I prefer to spend most of my leisure time in Hell's Limbo which is a relatively quiet and, I believe, tenantable place, with the least moaning and complaining about the climate.

I provide no escape from Limbo Hell, but many ensconced in this region might argue that residence is far preferable to spending a boring eternity browsing - aimlessly and brainlessly - in a mindless Eden.”

Luci went on, sparing no detail on her protocols for assignment of inmates to Hell's evil compartments.

Knowledge was dispirited, his query unanswered,
‘What had happened to his love?’

At least, she was not in Hell.

28. Adam and Eve Repatriated

God was pleased.

Adam, Eve, - even Luci - had faithfully executed their plan to corral and recapture all of the knowledge of good and evil that had gone astray.

Most of the world's sentient souls, as weightless as Higg's bosons and elusive as dark matter, were now safely confined in Hell, while barely seventy-odd articulated omnibuses filled with truly passionate God-fearing sycophants had been transported to the Elysian Fields.

Heaven's happy hapless would barely fill a major university's football stadium.

And even though they were clearly unworthy sinners, the agents of His assault on knowledge, Adam and Eve, would be delivered of their promised rewards and be returned to His Garden.

God's decision was a concession to practicality.

He had to have someone do His dirty work.

On re-arrival, Eve took one look at the Garden and shuddered. Somehow, someone, had failed or not been instructed to expunge her intellect - so that Eve now saw Eden with the eyes of one who still possessed sensibility, sensitivity, discernment, feeling, compassion, - and knowledge.

Eve glanced at Adam - and, from his grimace, it appeared that he, too, had retained his faculties.

Both had taken great pains to avoid allowing themselves to become infected with the *ignorance virus*.

They had taken exceptional care since they were loath to part with their own knowledge and intelligence - not to mention, risk sacrificing the thrill of their intimacy.

Now, almost to their astonishment, God, himself, had imported them back to Eden, each still armed with the capability for rational thought and independent action.

They each realized, God had made a boo-boo.

Book VI: Eden Revisited

29. A Return Visit to the Tree

Adam and Eve followed the verdant path. Just as they remembered, there it was, - the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Again, Lilith was comfortably and beguilingly entwined in its branches.

“Welcome back to the Garden”, she cooed. “How did you enjoy your term of banishment in God’s earthly underworld?”

“How is it that God puts up with you - allowing you to continue to dwell in his special tree and proselytize among his chosen to promote rebellion and mutiny?”, Adam demanded in response.

“It seems you have retained a degree of sinful cynicism,” Lilith observed immediately. *“Can it be that you still possess knowledge?”*

Adam was having none of this banter. He deeply mistrusted Lilith, although he begrudgingly credited her with introducing Eve to the history of Early Eve and divulging the divine benefits of knowledge.

However, Lilith was evil, subversive, traitorous, ... She, or it, held allegiance neither to Paradise nor God. Lilith was devoted to creating dissent and bringing pain and misfortune to all she encountered.

Adam drew Eve away to a distant, secluded and, he hoped, private spot.

“I hate this place.”, he confided. *“We have to get away from here as soon as ...”*

Eve was well ahead of him. She had been planning escape from the moment she laid eyes on Lilith and the God-forsaken apple tree.

30. Eden Revisited

Paradise smelled bad.

Reeking from the residual deposits of innumerable animals, both large and larger, as well from the emanations and defecations of Eden's clearly unconcerned inhabitants, dross could be found everywhere. No expanse of garden foliage could subsume the ever-increasing accumulation of fecal waste, trash, and garbage.

Paradise's dinosaurs were, without question, the greatest offenders.

And although none of the Edeners seemed to take notice, there was nary a port-a-potty in Heaven.

How to leave this foul place? Where to go? Would life on what was left of earth be any more bearable than the revulsion any thinking, sentient being would endure in God's putrescent zombie land?

Adam and Eve recognized that it was their own fault. They had labored diligently and enthusiastically, even aligning with evil forces, to destroy knowledge on earth.

In the process, they had brought quietus to billions of humans most of whose residual essences had now been transported to hell.

Just as bad, they had delivered the world's most pitiable, senseless, and gullible human souls to an intellectual wasteland where their only consolation, if they could have even perceived it, would be that they were no longer capable of recognizing their own state of slavery and loss of reason.

If anyone, Adam and Eve should be among those rotting in hell along with the multitudes they had betrayed.

Oddly, and penitently, they agreed.

It was also, it turns out, Rosh Hashanah which, in Jewish tradition, is believed to be the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve

- and a time for introspection and casting off of sins.

They would petition God to be cast into hell.

31. Escape from Eden: A Reprise

It was not hard to persuade God to send them both to hell.

God realized that he had violated His very own sacred principles in sanctioning any evildoers, even those He had Himself commissioned, such as Adam and Eve, to return to Eden - effectively as a reward for the resounding success of their iniquities.

Annoyed with Himself, and as part of their shipment to hell, God decided to further clean house by more extreme vetting.

A critical review of each of Eden's inmates revealed that, in the turbulence of the global influx, He had harbored some interlopers who were, in retrospect, clearly unworthy of occupying His Heavenly sanctuary.

In conducting His review, God came upon one particular agonized soul that pleaded to know the fate of her beloved - Knowledge.

God winced. He had to explain to Mary that Knowledge had been relegated to hell - for the sin of...? - simply being the kernel of knowledge - and an unbeliever.

God, especially, realized that this was hardly an honorable excuse for such a cruel and unfair judgment on His part.

Knowledge had shown himself to be a decent, hard-working, compassionate person. He had led an exemplary life.

What Mary asked next shocked Him. Would He send her to hell to join her love? It meant that much to her simply to be with him - especially in his suffering.

God was almost moved to tears. He recognized He had been an unmitigated bastard.

Embarrassed, God sent all His culls, as well as Mary, to hell.

He felt He could not bear to face her in Eden forever.

32. Reunited in Hell

Mary conjured Knowledge instantly upon arrival.

They were now both together in Hell

- and they were happy.

The sweethearts exchanged reminiscences of their earthly life. They detailed their celestial journeys for hours, days, ... Ethereal flowers seemed to bloom in the halo of the radiance from their innocent and unblemished ardor.

Theirs was undiluted love at its purest and most righteous.

Their mutual joy transcended any discomfort their perilous surroundings might inflict on souls less intimately entwined.

Gradually, other hell-confined spirits began to take notice. They listened to the discourse of the lovers. They were moved. Tears of compassion began to mix with Hell's standard fare of tears of pain.

The aura of the requited love of the sweethearts seemed to serve as balm for some of Hell's collective pain and distress.

It wasn't long before over 10^9 hits were logged on Knowledge's transcendental home page.

'Perhaps', one wag tweeted, 'love IS all you really need ...'

Hell was abuzz. The unaccustomed essence of Love began to permeate its foul air.

As many hearkened to the simple colloquy between the lovers, virtual tears came to all who retained any sense of empathy and compassion.

And, then, an intensifying groundswell of outrage.

How could God have let this happen? He had unfairly consigned two of the most decent and virtuous people in the universe to hell.

This was inexcusable. Even God should not be permitted to get away with such an unethical and flagrant violation of justice.

Moreover, if God had conspicuously erred in this judgment, what about His other referrals?

An appeal to a higher court was in order.

33. Rebellion

By now, the clients of hell were in a feverish uproar.

Seizing common cause with the unfairly punished lovers, the residual billions of self-righteous condemned sinners quickly became agitated and unified with a growing passion for rebellion from that despotic God who had placed all of them, without just cause they were certain, in this extraterrestrial penal colony.

They would demand their day in ...

They would appeal to ...

Who?

Even by Hell's standards, the tumult created by the infuriated, rebellious inmates was becoming irritating and exasperating to its keepers.

Uncharacteristically, Luci found herself at a loss. She was no longer able to control routine events or effectively impose heinous punishments.

Even as the coordinated pandemonium continued to intensify, Hell's she-devil actually began to lobby her wards to maintain some degree of tranquility.

Threatening to inflict pain and retribution was no longer serving as an effective ultimatum for cowing her internees.

Anger trumped agony.

Hell's patrons smelled blood - and, for once, it was not their own. Their amalgamated fury intensified and, like the universe itself, inexorably continued to expand.

In anger and desperation, Luci decided to consult God. After all, His actions had precipitated this revolution. He should be called upon to acknowledge, confront, and mitigate it.

God had heard and was already being inconvenienced by Hell's cacophony. No sooner had He begun to fully enjoy the fawning and prayerful praise from Heaven's remaining sycophants - now that the last of its troublemakers had been purged, - but the howls of Hell's enraged hordes was viscerally penetrating to the very core of His Paradise.

Eden's inhabitants were, first, startled, then, progressively, confused and upset by the rising din and caterwauling. His adoring fan base was becoming restless. Some even had the temerity to question whether something was amiss - or out of His control - in the Elysian Fields.

Meeting at a neutral site in Purgatory, God and Luci, at first, agreed to simply let the furor die down. With time, they reasoned, Hell's revolutionary passion - and this unprecedented solidarity of the damned - would dissipate.

But, somehow, Hell's mutineers either sensed, - or learned through Wikileaks, - of this profane collaboration. Moreover, their captor and tormentor's strategy seemed self-evident.

Accordingly, the condemned rabble labored to increase their ululation, synchronizing their combined resonance until God's very firmament trembled.

The intensified vibrations of billions of Hell's full-throated banshees even threatened to *'break the waters'*.

A heavenly tsunami was in the offing.

*“Then shall the lame man leap as an hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the
wilderness shall waters break out, and streams
in the desert.”*

Meanwhile, Eden’s agitated tenants were approaching full panic and starting to lose confidence - even, faith - in God’s ability to maintain serenity and provide them with eternally serene protection.

As a result, Eden’s seemingly passive predators were beginning to look alarmingly predaceous.

God and Luci regarded each other with dismay. Before long, an irascible and impatient Luci demanded urgent, concrete action to quell the instability in both their realms.

Under these circumstances, and on second thought, God felt inclined to make an accommodation.

After all, as everyone knew, He was a merciful and forgiving God.

If Luci would concur, He would moderate His condemnations of all the souls in Hell, precluding any further gratuitous imposition of pain and suffering on them.

Of course, Luci would continue to reign over Hell's domain, but she would inflict no further suffering, abusive indignities or retributive punishments on Hell's residents.

It would be somewhat akin to a celestial amnesty.

Reluctantly, Luci agreed, but not without exacting some territorial claims on God's own domain.

She would be granted perpetual dominion over that portion of the Garden that included His apple orchard.

Considering all the trouble this plot had already caused Him, God conceded this parcel.

34. "The Path to Paradise begins in Hell"

Dante

Following amnesty and absolution, Hell began to take on quite a different aspect. Darkness receded. A range of color (besides, red) returned. Pervasive communal fear was gradually replaced by an inexplicable blend of relief and modest contentment.

In many metaphysical respects, Hell began to resemble Eden, except for the absence of dinosaurs, fearsome wild beasts and perpetually-praying, passive petitioners.

The once-terrible appearance of Hell began to mellow into more pastoral and bucolic imagery.

But there were important differences, too. There were a great number of souls in Hell. Despite their vanishingly low density, the netherworld could be considered quite crowded. Accordingly, Hell's newly enfranchised populace began to reorganize themselves in an effort to ease accommodations.

A degree of organization was possible in Hell because many of the hellions, as they referred to themselves, remained sentient. Their intellectual residuals had not been fully cleansed in preparation for an eternity in Eden. Instead, they were to be allowed to sense the pain and humiliation of eternal damnation.

As a result, Hell's engineers, scientists, politicians and bureaucrats were still capable of planning.

Some of their number began to develop protocols for prodding Hell's internees toward a more equitable and tranquil sharing of the resources of their overpopulated netherworld.

There could even be waste collection and sanitary disposal - in the event any tangible solid waste was generated.

Death in mortal sin had become, - not only, less forbidding - but, somewhat more convivial.

35. "Happy as Hell"

Accordingly, Hell's din subsided to a gentle thrumming.

Still, among the murmur of those that had been granted God's dispensation from pain and torture could be heard some renowned, and rather insolent, voices:

"Let this hell be our heaven."

Richard Matheson, What Dreams May Come

"I would prefer an intelligent hell to a stupid paradise."

Blaise Pascal - and - Victor Hugo

... whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse."

Isaac Asimov

"A fool's paradise is a wise man's hell."

Thomas Fuller

"You won't burn in hell. But be nice anyway."

Ricky Gervais

"I don't like to commit myself about Heaven and Hell, you see, I have friends in both places."

Mark Twain

“Hell is just a frame of mind.”

Christopher Marlowe

“So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales!”

Jean-Paul Sartre

“The mind is a universe and can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

John Milton

*“Once I was free in the shackles of sin:
Free to be tempted, just bound to give in;
Free to be captive to any desire;
Free to eternally burn in hell's fire.
'Til Someone bought me and called me His slave:
Bound by commands I am free to obey;
Captive by beauty I'm free to adore—
Sentenced to sit at His feet evermore.”*

John MacArthur

“No, there are no special places in hell. Hell is a democracy.”

Mike Carey

“Hell is paved with good intentions.”

Samuel Johnson

"Heaven and Hell make no sense if the majority of humans are a complex mixture of good and evil. There's no reason to receive a reward if you're 57/43. Why sit around forever in an elevated version of Club Med?"

Norman Mailer

"Hell is full of musical amateurs: music is the brandy of the damned. May not one lost soul be permitted to abstain?"

George Bernard Shaw

"To rule by fettering the mind through fear of punishment in another world, is just as base as to use force. Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all."

Hypatia

"Written over the gate here are the words 'Leave every hope behind, ye who enter.' Only think what a relief that is! For what is hope? A form of moral responsibility. Here there is no hope, and consequently no duty, no work, nothing to be gained by praying, nothing to be lost by doing what you like. Hell, in short is a place where you have nothing to do but amuse yourself."

George Bernard Shaw

"Hell will be Heaven with Friends, Heaven will be Hell without them."

Aman Jassal

“In monasteries, seminaries, retreats and synagogues, they fear hell and seek paradise. Those who know the mysteries of God never let that seed be planted in their souls.”

Omar Khayyam

“The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay.

If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way.”

Rebecca Solnit

“Eternal peace is hell for the adventurers.”

Toba Beta

“Hierarchies are celestial. In hell all are equal.”

Nicolás Gómez Dávila

“Heaven without love : what a hell. (Paradis sans amour : voilà ce qu'est l'enfer)”

Charles de Leusse

“Take her head upon your knee; Say to her, "My dear, my dear, It is not so dreadful here.”

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Despite a network of electronic firewalls and spam filters to preclude intergalactic communications, there appeared to be some unsanctioned crosstalk between Heaven and Hell.

Through this breach, an assortment of the smug, self-satisfied adorers of God in Heaven had discovered that the damned souls in Hell were no longer being subjected to pain and misery.

Worse, some of Hell's condemned sinners were reputed to be happy.

This being the case, why had Eden's saintly gone to all the trouble of remaining virtuous throughout their lives?

The promised pitiless and unending penalties of Hell were a major motivation for many of those who chose to remain faithful to an invisible and unresponsive God - and, for a handful of these devotees, to remain celibate as well.

To further curry favor with God and ensure their entry to Paradise, many true believers had steadfastly repudiated logic and resisted subscribing to advances in technology and science, particularly whenever it conflicted with - or worse, refuted - their biblical mythologies.

A surprising proportion of devout Paridisians had, similarly, uncritically renounced all the inconvenient scientific truths aggregated by Al Gore, even going so far as to lend credence - even repute - to Senator James Imhofe's (Republican, Oklahoma) exposé of the *'the second-largest hoax ever played on the American people, after the separation of church and state.'*

Jimmy's target was the frighteningly un-Biblical concept of anthropogenically induced global warming.

Intellectual - and scientific - advisor to the faithful and credulous, *'Mountain Jim'* ignored the existence and use of the thermometer as well as data from orbiting satellites as he revealed - and explained - that:

'no meaningful warming has occurred in the last century.'

'as long as the earth remains there will be seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night.' Genesis 8:22

If choosing to willingly subscribe to such Imhofian improbabilities - and other impossibilities - did not bring them heavenly reward and, further, distinctly separate them from their unrepentant and unworthy companions on earth who, they were promised, would endure indescribable eternal torture in Hell, what was their abject denial good for?

Had their life-long physical - as well as intellectual sacrifices - not really been worthwhile?

Might they just as well have accepted the benefits that science had offered, fully utilized their intellect - and, ultimately, - entered Club Hell themselves?

Celestial Amnesty was leading to dissension in Heaven.

36. The Exodus or “See You in Hell”

It was a one-way trip.

Heaven’s elect could be consigned - or, in some cases, allowed - to dwell among the derelict Hellions, whereas any uplift to God’s sacred province was strictly prohibited.

Even so, beginning in a halting and totally unforeseen fashion, an exodus from Heaven began.

For most of the migrants, their migration was motivated by an intense, innate desire to be reunited with their families and loved ones.

Many, just as Mary, had found that Paradise could be a terribly lonely place without the solace and peace-of-mind that comes only from being close to those with whom one has shared life, love, and, - yes, - even pain.

And now that Hell was, reputedly, virtually free of pain and punishment, what did they have to lose?

God was mortified. How could this be happening?

Didn't the once-in-a-deathtime opportunity for His chosen few to spend an eternity next to Him, so that He could hear and revel in their praise, trump any residual earthly social and familial encumbrances?

Apparently not.

The trickle grew into a rivulet; then, an outpour. The Garden's select population, never very large owing to God's stringent criteria for admission, was diminishing to the point of impending labor shortages.

It was reaching the extremity where even some of His angels had to put down their lutes in order to spend time cultivating and weeding.

God imagined His glory fading.

37 Luci confronts Hell's Immigration Problem

One would have thought that Luci would be enthralled. After all, the way things were evolving in Heaven, Hell would soon encompass essentially all the spirits in the universe. But what to do with this unproductive collection of vapors?

The reasons for the escalating defections from Zion embodied Luci's problem. Partly, she had capacity and management issues; but, mostly, it was Hell's unbridled spirit of jubilation created by repatriation and reunion.

Hell was not only becoming a desirable destination where kindred souls reconnected; it was becoming both a sought-after haven and a celestial refuge from intellectual captivity and eternal boredom.

Having reluctantly given up her franchise to impose and supervise pain and suffering, this turn of events did not mesh with Luci's concept of either improvement or empowerment.

This was not her idea of Hell.

Make no mistake. Luci was not above abrogating her agreement - unilaterally.

—- *To be continued - until Hell freezes over.*

Book VII: Hell Freezes Over

38: Yes!, Hell Freezes Over

Luci could still control Hell's climate - or, in this case, its perceived ambient temperature.

So, in raw, uncontrollable anger, she decided to completely turn off the heat.

It seemingly took only moments for intergalactic space weather conditions to become established. Atomic and molecular vibrations and related oscillations diminished to a virtual standstill.

Ethereal communications slowed; then, ceased.

No complaints were heard because no pulsations or reverberations could be perceived at any frequency.

It was as if death, in its ultimate darkness, had finally come to the whole of the underworld's vast population. All Hell had become a void of soundless and illimitable dark matter.

0° Kelvin (and Rankine) had finally been achieved.

Primum frigidum. It was irreversible.

All was quiet now.

Luci quickly became bored. Impulsively, she had ceded rule of her once powerful and violent domain to a great nothingness. Her very *raison d'être* could no longer be justified.

Even new recruits, if there were still any to be had, would have no substantive Hell to dwell in.

Death had become, - simply, - death.

Luci would normally have foreseen this. However, in her fury, she had acted impulsively in imposing the nuclear cold sanction - and it had resulted in her voiding the Universe of its most renowned - and feared - destination for the damned.

Still, she would not - or, perhaps, at this terminal point, could not - back down. Even if it might be possible for her to muster the universe's electrochemical resources and aggregate the enormous energy cache required to restore her province, her pride precluded her giving Hell's rebels the satisfaction of seeing her flail against her self-inflicted misadventure.

Growing ever more upset, irritated, and restless, Luci would visit God and see how things were going in Heaven.

God dropped his hoe and welcomed the distraction.

Since His amnesty, followed by the exodus, He had lost much of His heavenly labor force. He now spent much of His time doing routine chores in His Garden.

There was little for Him to do with no one to watch over on an earthly underworld now bereft of human life. Just as Luci, he felt the unfamiliar weight of boredom now that there was so little call for use of His Godly powers in the cosmos.

Luci and God spoke of old times. Unabashedly, they revealed, recounted, and lamented the mistakes they had both made.

Sometimes, they quipped, they had acted almost as if they were human.

The old adversaries chuckled at the many ruses they had devised to undermine one another's influence in the yin and yang of their struggle for humanity's souls - plus their many rivalries for recruitment of essences for their competing afterworlds.

Perhaps, they could now be cosmic friends - spiritual equals - in a universe that no longer required - or accommodated - conflict between good and evil.

39. Postpartum

Luci and God fashioned an arrangement.

Since Luci had no residual '*home*' to which to return or celestial prison to dominate, She would need an alternative dwelling place.

She reminded God of His pledge to cede His orchard to Her. Luci would set up Her celestial residence in the Garden, alongside God.

They would regale each other with tales of former glories - and atrocities. They would provide diversions and keep each other company.

Luci could be an entertaining and, - without hell to administer, - a whimsical Devil.

At this juncture, the erstwhile adversaries could erase their enmity, cease their incessant pursuit of dominance, relax their tensions, and enjoy an eternity of peace and quiet together.

Why not?

Theirs was a union made in Heaven.

Epilogue: Earth after Eschaton

(A Rebirth of Intelligent Life on the Sun's Third Planet)

The long-anticipated events cryptically foretold in the Abrahamic (and it might be noted, also the major non-Abrahamic) religions had finally come to fruition. In the immediate aftermath of the cataclysmic global deintellectualization of the world's population resulting from the ingestion and activation of the *Ignorance Virus*, a clinical accounting had been conducted by the Creator and Ruler of the Universe and Source of all Moral Authority, the wicked had been judged and the righteous rewarded. Accordingly, all earthly souls had been duly dispatched either to Heaven or Hell.

Since, by far, most of humanity's souls had been consigned to Hell, Luci was pleased. Unaware of impending celestial catastrophe, she approved of God's selection criteria, protocols, prejudices, and dispensation of Celestial justice.

All that remained on Earth in the aftermath of the *Tribulation, Rapture, and Ascension* were essentially nine billion soulless, rotting human carcasses.

Earth had become blissfully devoid of the noise, clutter and chaos of environmentally-destructive human activities.

Traffic and building construction had ceased. Power plants had cooled and their massive turbines ceased rotating. Battlefields were silent. Only battery-, solar- and wind-powered operated devices continued to perform their robotic functions. Everywhere, there was an agreeable, unaccustomed quiet.

Otherwise, in most respects, Earth remained complete and intact. Its patterns of day and night were unaltered. Its tides continued. Its weather patterns, still variable, were unchanged.

Tectonic movements continued to push continents along at glacial speed, but there was no one to interpret the resulting seismographic rumblings.

For the first time in millennia, sports hunting seasons approached and receded without archery or gunfire. If they escaped predation by their aggressive carnivore brethren, a growing number of turkeys, geese and deer could now die of old age.

Purged of humanity, earth was now on its way, - through passive entropy, decomposition, and decay, - to becoming purified of all the toxic and refractory residuals left behind by its rapacious human exploiters.

There was, however, one alien - or, perhaps, to characterize it more romantically - *heavenly* element that remained on planet Earth.

In her final moments on Earth, as the *Ignorance Virus* wreaked its mind-debilitating effects on all those around her, Eve carefully retrieved the few seeds she had sequestered from Adam's apple core before being dispatched along with him on his mission for God.

Increasingly plagued by remorse and regret over her treacherous role in the destruction of mankind, Eve decided to plant the apple seeds from Eden's Tree of Knowledge near a less-trammeled grove near the tidal basin in Central Park.

In some way, she reasoned, should the seeds take root and prosper, some benign element of knowledge just might survive on earth.

Years passed following Eve's departure - and the sown seeds ultimately created, first, a young, vigorous sapling - and, some years thereafter, a fully productive apple tree.

The fruit of Eve's celestial-sourced tree did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Ever-foraging, small animal, bird and insect creatures soon found the sweetness of its fruit. In addition to sustenance, they were also astonishingly rewarded with - knowledge.

Thus began the rebirth of a dynamic era of intensive, organized activity on earth.

Planet of the Squirrels (*Sciuridae*)

Within a few decades, the industrious, inquisitive,



persistent, skillful, and acrobatic community of newly-enlightened squirrels (their name derived from *esquire*) had organized to access, occupy, and utilize the most highly-developed resources of their human antecedents.

Buildings, farms, shopping centers, factories, even industrial production facilities of various sorts were soon colonized and pressed into the service of a burgeoning, creative rodent society.

As time progressed, these new masters of the earth evolved to develop an ever more sophisticated, though high-pitched, language. Even a fledgling music industry began to emerge. Always happy-go-lucky, squirrel pups began to indulge in sophisticated play and developed remarkably competitive team sports.

Perhaps of greatest importance demographically, squirrel numbers increased exponentially owing both to the availability of abundant, comfortable housing and a remarkably wide range of cultivated food sources beyond their traditional fare of nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetation.

As with humans, prosperity even resulted in many squirrels becoming overweight by small mammal standards.

Their discovery and utilization of fire led to their development of ever more complex culinary skills. Evolving tastes included meat dishes, a number of which were eerily akin to beef stroganoff.

The creation of this alternate protein menu also led to the domestication - and, ultimately, culling and slaughter - of other, presumably intellectually inferior, animal species.

In recognition of the value of a life longer than seven years plus an innate desire for a less labor-intensive, carefree existence, squirrel shamans, medical technicians, and rudimentary hospitals began to emerge.

Special incubator centers were crafted and assigned to the care of squirrel newborn pups which are born naked, toothless, and blind. Since mortality due to roadkill, freezing, and starvation had dropped dramatically, squirrel life expectancy had almost instantly doubled and the likelihood of injury and age-related infirmity had increased markedly.

Deference and primitive religious rites began to memorialize the most prominent, influential, and properous among the squirrel elderly.

However, the social and economic expansion did not necessarily extend to all squirrel and rodent factions equally.

Territorial rivalries emerged. The more numerous brown squirrels held the red squirrel community at paw's length with respect to arboreal residences and favored feeding and planting grounds.

Moreover, both sects were repulsed by and discriminated openly against their rat brethren who continued to utilize dark and sinister underground passages and lairs. Mice were subjugated owing to their size and weakness.

All were agreed, however, that certain animal species intrinsically lacked intelligence and were intended, by some higher being, to be enslaved for labor - or propagated and slaughtered for nutrition. (Groundhogs, for example.)

Emerging social norms, therefore, led to development of animal husbandry where weak - or intellectually disadvantaged - animals were corralled and either trained - or fed and bred - to serve a variety of more beneficial purposes.

A protective shrine was established around the Holy Apple Tree that had gifted knowledge and power to the dominant brown squirrel population.

Guided by a new class of clergy, the reputed day of enlightenment was celebrated throughout the modern world as the '*Day of Awakening*'.

Only the holiest and most reverent among the squirrel constituency were allowed to approach the inner reaches of the Sacred Tree.

Once each year, the most holy clergy were permitted to approach the Sacred Tree and, deferentially and ceremoniously, climb onto its branches.

The fallen Apples of the Holy Tree were scrupulously collected, consecrated, fermented, and placed into containers for shipment throughout the New World so that a handful of the most generous contributors to the Faith could be anointed with their inspired Elixir as part of increasingly elaborate holy rituals.

Ironically, a nascent religion was evolving to cloak this new Holy Rodent constituency with a new mythology of

squirrel genesis which ordained them as a superior, chosen race.

Before long, this new squirrel regime would have to build defenses against usurpers, against non-believers, and against devotees of rival religious sects.

These parallels with the previous regimes of the *homo sapiens* on earth were becoming increasingly discernible to the handful of scholarly rodents that had begun to develop the ability to read ancient texts.

A new earthly evolution was beginning for the:

Planet of the Squirrels

(as will be told in earth's post-Final Testament).

Eschaton - The Final Revelation

is the last revelation to be appended to the Holy Bible, and despite a modest degree of darkness, it foretells an end times that might be considered to have a happy ending.

Eschaton
The Final Testament
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